

### III. Plan Development

#### OVERVIEW

Early in the process of developing this plan, and after having held public scoping meetings, the planning team identified a list of issues and concerns that was likely to be associated with the conservation management of the refuge.



USFWS Photo

#### SCOPING OF ISSUES AND CONCERNS

Issue identification is a major factor in determining management goals and objectives. To ensure that management of the refuge is reflective of the issues and concerns, a series of meetings and interviews were conducted to guide the planning effort. The planning process was coordinated with federal, state, and local agencies, as well as organizations and surrounding communities. This coordination is essential to ensure support for the plan and projects identified for the refuge.

Issues and concerns were generated based upon contact with citizens and public agencies, and on resource needs identified by staff. A Service planning team was assembled to evaluate and identify steps to rectify these issues and resource needs, and to measure the impact of plan implementation. Afterwards, the team developed a list of goals, objectives, and strategies to shape the management of the refuge for the next 15 years.

Issue identification provided the basis for initiating the development of management objectives and strategies. These issues play a role in determining future conditions of the refuge. The issues and concerns described in the following pages were generated by the public and Service staff.

#### *Fish and Wildlife Populations*

- Migratory songbird diversity and populations are significantly declining.
- Neighbors expressed a concern that Service management activities on the refuge could attract birds that may feed on fish in nearby catfish ponds.
- Some wildlife species including deer, beaver, feral hog, and raccoon are damaging or altering forest conditions to the detriment of other wildlife species and habitat (e.g., songbirds).
- There is a lack of information about Service plans for management of the Louisiana black bear. Sightings are rare. Refuge neighbors are concerned about the effects that bears might have on people and property, when and if they do return to the refuge.
- There is no management emphasis on certain wildlife species, including fish, bats, shorebirds, reptiles, and amphibians.

### *Habitats*

- The refuge forest boundaries are heavily fragmented forest and conditions and proportions are of poor habitat value to breeding birds.
- There are too few surveys and studies conducted on the refuge.
- There is a concern that the remaining old growth trees might be harvested or overly managed by the Service.
- The existing forests have received little management attention by the Service.

### *Education and Visitor Services*

- Access to the refuge headquarters and throughout the refuge is difficult for both staff and visitors. Service employees and visitors must rely on parish road conditions, while the conditions of internal trails dictate use.
- The refuge offers limited opportunities to view and photograph wildlife. The trails are impassable during high rainfall and prolonged flooding.
- There are limited hunting and fishing opportunities on the refuge.
- There are no educational/interpretive facilities or programs available to local and regional schools, conservation clubs, and communities at large.
- There is a lack of information about the purpose of the refuge and available visitor opportunities.

### *Refuge Administration*

- The lack of staff to manage refuge biological programs and forestry management is a fundamental issue.
- The refuge entrance road (Poole Road) is at times unsafe because of surface conditions.
- The refuge office has inadequate space to support existing staff, volunteers, and the visiting public.
- There are few parking facilities and signs. There was a concern that providing additional access or improved access might impact forest habitats and fish and wildlife populations.
- Since most of the refuge boundary has not been surveyed, it is difficult to enforce game violations and protect wildlife and habitat near refuge boundaries.

### *Land Protection and Conservation*

- There is a concern about sedimentation, erosion, and turbidity resulting from land use activities off the refuge and the effects within the watershed.